

ICPS newsletter[®]

What public journalism means: Tips for local journalists

The development of local government in Ukraine depends not only on political and economic processes, but also on how the average Ukrainian voter is informed about and participates in this process. Here, journalists can play the role of an effective mediator between the community and its government. A handbook called "Public Journalism: Local government, public involvement and professional standards for the media" has been published as part of the "People's Voice" project implemented by the World Bank, PADCO and ICPS. Its goal is to help journalists not only better understand the reality and the problems of local government in Ukraine, but also improve their professional skills in covering this issue

Every society needs enterprising and independent media professionals who form their own policies and know how to attract readers, listeners or viewers interested in a quality material. Local journalists need to deliver information to their audience that is interesting not only for them Ukrainian citizens, but also as residents of a particular town. Trust in the media will tangibly grow if journalists demonstrate in-depth knowledge of the proper mechanisms for public involvement in local government and act in their special capacity in this process.

Local government in the media

In addition to information, the media ensures public communication and establishes a system of relations among various social groups and institutions. Their mutual perception of each other depends on how fully and correctly the media passes information among them. For local media, full and correct presentation of materials is critically important.

The current image of local government has many drawbacks, first of all due to its imperfections and uncertainty about the distribution of powers as a result of political reform. The media itself is also responsible for certain distortions in the image of local governments. This is specifically the result of a media that is excessively politicized and, therefore, ready to present information in a simplified manner—by reflecting the position of a certain political force or political figure.

As a result of an overly long active political period, Ukraine's media developed an ear for political "events" and slogans that certain "clients" are ready to "encourage" financially. It has become very difficult to see the actual event, news or trend beyond the bounds of political discussions.

The authors of this Handbook are convinced that local government will have a more attractive image in the eyes of voters if the media reject this simplified approach to covering local life. A community that is well-informed about the real situation, about the entire range of problems and proposals for their solutions, will be able, firstly, to more frequently voice fair and justified disagreements with the government and, secondly, to more rapidly play its role in eliminating these problems.

Tips for local journalists

1. Write on the basis of selected themes. The independence of a modern journalist is determined not only by the elimination of political pressure and the cancellation of censorship. Independent journalists are individuals who, first of all, know their social function and the purpose of their work, and use journalistic means as professional tools.

When there are a large number of events, journalists tend to receive ready-made information in the form of press announcements and press releases and gradually become dependent on this information. At those times when there are no events—dead seasons in small towns happen much more frequently—,

By the way...

- On 27 July 2006, Director of International Centre for Policy Studies Viktor Chumak attended a public presentation of the Government's performance indicators for the first half of 2006. Mr. Chumak gave a speech, presenting ICPS's assessment of the Cabinet of Ministers' performance and socio-economic results for H1'06.
- Liza Barany, ICPS's project development and marketing specialist, is currently doing an internship in the US as part of an Open World program called "Developing the Third Sector: Management and the search for funding." The program is implemented with the financial support of the Open World Leadership Center.
- On 10–11 July 2006, ICPS Program and Project Manager Oleksandr Liakh and Director of the Twinning Administrative Office in Ukraine Andriy Vyshnevskiy visited the Polish Office of the Committee for European Integration in Warsaw. During this visit, Mr. Liakh visited Poland's Twinning Administrative Office, the Office of the Committee for European Integration of Poland, the Office of the Civil Service of Poland, and other Polish executive agencies that have implemented similar Twinning projects. During these meetings, the two sides discussed the specifics of implementing the Twinning instrument in the new EU Member States, the place and the role of TAIEIX (Technical Assistance Information Exchange Unit) as an instrument, and possible forms of cooperation between Polish executive bodies and their Ukrainian partners and counterparts. In addition, the first results of implementing this instrument in Ukraine were presented to our Polish colleagues, especially the progress of preparing and implementing the first projects.

very few journalists seek and analyze information independently. Thematic distinctions are the solution to this problem.

Sector-based or theme-based writing means that a journalist selects a set of issues and problems inherent to a certain sector of the economy or a certain topic and specializes in this. This choice is generally constant, but can be expanded with the help of new approaches to perennial problems, by new assessments of old issues, and by raising new problems and issues. After all, the main job of a media professional is to collect and organize information according to a specialization, so that, the necessary information can be "pulled out of the drawer" at the right time and full-fledged independent material made on its basis.

The advantages of theme- or sector-based writing are:

- work can be planned for a long period of time in advance;
- not just any subject is jumped at, without regard to the writer's familiarity with it;
- news related to the journalist's specialty is immediately reported;
- self-actualization is the fundamental goal of the journalist, who prepares meaningful analytical materials.

2. Add layers of information from the government sources. For a journalist, government offices are an inexhaustible

gold mine of diverse, meaningful and accurate information and are indefatigable generators of information flows. With access to such generous sources, a media professional can save considerable time and efforts in the search for ideas for press, radio and television stories.

There are two options for retrieving information:

- independently search for sources of information in government offices;
- turn to press services and public and media relations specialists.

To seek information independently, the journalist needs to be well-oriented in the corridors of power and understand the structure, functions and authorities of different departments and officials. With perseverance and a professional approach, a reporter can collect a good deal of useful information.

As a rule, press services make the life of journalists a lot easier, because they are generally guided by a simple principle: "If you want something to be written well, write it yourself." At the same time, using information provided by press services should never turn the journalist into a scribe who simply rewrites materials produced by other people.

3. Make catchy headlines. Every story begins with a headline. Whether the audience will actually bother to pay attention to a particular piece depends

very strongly on what headline the journalist has come up with, whether it is intriguing or humdrum. The headline should not only match the topic, but also be brief. Readers notice and remember short headlines better.

Of course, newswire headlines can be long and Ukrainian journalists are trying to switch to western standards. Such headlines are intended to inform by giving the reader a summary of the story that follows. But most readers are more receptive of informal, creative headlines. ■

The handbook for local journalists called "Public Journalism: Local government, public involvement and professional standards for the media" was prepared on the basis of "Public Journalism," a two-module training course organized by the Center for Ukrainian Reform Education and the Pylyp Orlyk Institute for Democracy as part of the "People's Voice" project. This handbook was written by Alla Fedoryna, Alina Hlushayeva, Andriy Horbal, Serhiy Hubin, Oksana Kolisnyk, and Vadym Proshko.

The "People's Voice" project is being implemented by the World Bank, PADCO Inc., a consultancy, and the International Centre for Policy Studies. The "People's Voice" project, which terminates at the end of 2007, is being financed by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

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Setting up Policy Analysis Groups in Central Executive Bodies Project: Space Agency presents its vision of government policy towards space industry

On 20 July 2006, the National Space Agency presented its White Paper as part of the "Setting up 10 policy analysis groups (PAGs) under Ukraine's executive bodies" project. Participants in this discussion were from the National Space Agency, the International Centre for Policy Studies, the Aerospace Union, and Space-Inform, an information and analysis center.

This White Paper focused on the commercialization of space technologies as a promising area for making Ukraine's space industry more competitive in a market environment. The main objective of this document was to develop ways to improve the commercialization of space technologies. The authors are convinced that this will help develop policies to obtain a greater economic impact from introducing space technologies into various sectors of the domestic economy, promoting the competitiveness of these technologies on global markets, and attracting investment to adapt these technologies to market needs. The debate included a heated discussion on the efficient use of space technologies once the space industry is

commercialized more. Developing solutions to problems related with cutting-edge technologies will help develop Ukraine's space sector and its economy as a whole, to establish cooperation between Ukrainian and European partners, and to integrate Ukraine's hi-tech industry into that of the EU.

The pilot project to set up PAGs under the Secretariat of the President and the Secretariat of the Cabinet of Ministers and central executive bodies is being implemented on the initiative of the Main Administration of the Civil Service. The project was commissioned by the Center for Facilitating the Institutional Development of the Civil Service under the Main Administration of the Civil Service and is being implemented by the International Centre for Policy Studies, with funding from the State Budget.

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